* As on 1.4.2002, there werel 2388 stations with over-aged (more than 25 years old) signalling equipment. These include 1363 stations on A, B, C, D spl., D-E spl. routes.

* During 2001-02, work of replacement of over-aged equipment at signalling cabins of 131 stations was completed.

* The work of replacement of over-aged equipment at signalling cabins of the 1363 stations is in progress. The work is targeted for completion in the next 5 to 7 years. The rehabilitation/renewal work at the signalling cabins of the remaining stations which are more than 35 years old on E and MG routes is also in progress.

Unsafe rail lines

†1899. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the rail lines all over the country are becoming quite unsafe;

(b) if so, whether Government are contemplating to take any steps for safety of these rail lines; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI BANDARU DATTATRAYA): (a) to (c) No, Sir. Repair and maintenance of Railway track is an on-going process. Maintenance works are carried out regularly depending upon the need. For ensuring safety of traffic, track is inspected regularly and corrective action taken promptly wherever required. Track renewals are also undertaken depending upon the need of renewal and availability of funds. The following further steps have been taken to improve the safety:

(i) A non-lapsable Special Railway Safety Fund of Rs. 17,000/- crore has been set up for renewal of over-aged assets and for safety enhancement works which also covers track renewal.

(ii) There has been progressive increase in use of Tie Tamping and Ballast Cleaning Machines for track maintenance. Track Renewal Trains are also being used. This gives superior track geometry.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(iii) For monitoring track geometry and running characteristics of the track, sophisticated track recording cars, oscillograph cars and portable accelerometers are being used progressively.

(iv) For detection of hidden flaws in rails/welds, adequate number of Ultra Sonic Flaw Detectors have been procured. Self Propelled Ultrasonic Rail Testing Cars are being procured.

(v) At the Rail Rolling Mill at Bhilai, online Ultrasonic Flaw Detection (USFD) and eddy current testing is being done to weed out rails with defects, Vacuum degassing is being done to reduce hydrogen content and thus improve quality of rails. Indian Railways and Bhilai Steel Plant of Steel Authority of India Limited are also planning together to produce longer rails *i.e.* 26 metre and 65 or 78 metre, instead of conventional 13 metre length to reduce number of welds in the track.

(vi) Periodical Safety Audit of different divisions by inter-disciplinary teams for Zonal Headquarters is being conducted.

(vii) Security patrolling of track is organized whenever there is threat perception to safety of track from anti-social element.

(viii) Monsoon/winter/hot whether patrolling is organized to watch the vulnerable locations.

National Centre for Plant Genome Research

1900. SHRI K. M. KHAN: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to set up National Centre for Plant Genome Research;

(b) if so, the time-frame by which the centre would become operational;

(c) whether Government propose to develop lab-to-field linkages between the Centre and the farmers; and

(d) the total amount earmarked and spent?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND